

Community water fluoridation

“one of the great public health achievements of the twentieth century¹”

Nevada State Oral Health Advisory Committee

Community Coalition for Oral Health

Northern Nevada Dental Coalition for Underserved Populations



What is the Public Health Issue?

Oral health is integral to general health.² Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. In fact, it is the most common chronic disease of childhood.² The burden of disease is far worse for those who have limited access to prevention and treatment services. Tooth decay, left untreated, can cause pain and tooth loss. Untreated decay has been associated with difficulty in eating and being underweight.³ Untreated decay and tooth loss can have negative effects on an individual's self esteem and employability.

In the U.S. tooth decay affects:³

- ✓ 1 in 4 elementary school children
- ✓ 2 out of 3 adolescents
- ✓ 9 out of 10 adults

What is the impact of fluoridation?

Fluoride added to community drinking water at a concentration of 0.7 to 1.2 parts per million has repeatedly been shown to be a safe, inexpensive and extremely effective method of preventing tooth decay.² In fact, for every dollar spent on community water fluoridation, up to \$42 is saved in treatment costs for tooth decay.⁴ The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent, non-federal, multi-disciplinary task force appointed by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recently conducted a systematic review of studies of community water fluoridation. They found in communities that initiated fluoridation, the decrease in childhood decay was almost 30% over 3-12 years of follow-up.³ They strongly recommended community water fluoridation as an effective strategy to prevent tooth decay. Fluoridation benefits everyone in the community, regardless of socioeconomic status. Therefore, fluoridation provides protection against tooth decay in populations with limited access to prevention services.

How is Nevada doing?

In 2003, 67% of Nevada's third graders had experienced tooth decay, and in 2002, 20% of Nevada's 65 and older population had lost all of their permanent teeth. Only about 69% of Nevada's total population receives fluoridated water due to the lack of community water fluoridation in areas other than Clark County.⁵

Related Healthy People U.S. 2010 objectives.⁶

- ✓ Increase percentage of persons on public water receiving fluoridated water to 75%.
- ✓ Reduce percentage of adults 65+ who have lost all their teeth to 20%.
- ✓ Reduce tooth decay experience in children under 9 to 42%.

Healthy Nevada 2010 objective.⁹

- ✓ Reduce the proportion of children with tooth decay in their primary teeth.

What is Nevada doing⁷?

Community water suppliers in Clark County initiated water fluoridation in March 2000. Residents receiving water from the City of Henderson system and the Las Vegas Valley Water District (Southern Nevada Water Authority) receive fluoridated water. According to the Safe Drinking Water Information System (SDWIS), City of Henderson serves 209,525 persons, Southern Nevada Water Authority serves 1,158,392 persons, and Nellis Air Force Base serves 6,288 persons. The program estimates that 75% of Clark County has access to fluoridated water. In November 2002, the voters of Washoe County voted against adjusting the fluoride content of community water supplies to a level proven to reduce tooth decay. The final results were 58 percent "No," to 42 percent "Yes."⁵ Efforts continue to educate the public about optimal fluoridation in rural Nevada.

Strategies for Nevada's future:

- ✓ *Encourage fluoride supplements for those at increased risk for decay and not receiving fluoridated drinking water.*
- ✓ *Educate and empower the public regarding the benefits of fluoridation.*
- ✓ *Promote consumption of fluoridated bottled water by those who drink bottled water.*

References:

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